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UNCLAS HARARE 001615

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER

1E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAGR ECON PGOV ZI

SUBJECT: GOZ Targets Additional Commercial Farms and Properties in New Land Grab

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET POSTING.

11. (SBU) Summary. New lists of commercial farms continue to appear in the government-sponsored press. Hundreds of mostly white-owned farms have been "gazetted" for preliminary acquisition orders this year alone, despite public statements that the land acquisition exercise was successfully completed. While many listings are re-listings of properties which had been successfully challenged on technical grounds, the GOZ now appears to be targeting most remaining commercial properties. End summary.

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Nothing Is Sacred  
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12. (SBU) Despite public claims that the land resettlement program has been successfully completed, new listings and relistings of commercial farm properties continue unabated. On June 20, 2003, fifty-six farms were listed as recipients of preliminary (Section 5) notices of acquisition. On July 25, 2003, eighty additional farms were listed. On August 6, 2003, one hundred and fifty-two properties were listed. Most recently, on August 8, 2003, a further eighty-four properties were listed for compulsory acquisition. The range of property affected is staggering -- wildlife conservancy properties, multinational-owned sugar growing estates, privately-owned tea growing estates, commercial timber-growing properties, individual dairy farms, and extensive holdings (over 45,000 hectares) owned by the South African Oppenheimer family are all listed for compulsory acquisition.

13. (SBU) Theories abound as to the motivation behind the aggressive new listings. One local economist believes that the GOZ is attempting to assert outright ownership of all rural land, in order to craft a new land tenure system of long-term leases. Of course, implicit in such a strategy is the necessity for commercial farmers to relinquish title deeds and all future claims on their property in order to qualify for a lease. Another contact states that the mere act of listing these properties, particularly the massive landholdings of the sugar, tea, and conservancy estates, is merely a pretext for forcing the owners into a negotiating stance.

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"It's Our Turn Now..."  
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14. (SBU) This second contact cites the example of Masvingo governor Josiah Hungwe, in whose district much of the conservancy property and all of the sugar estate property lies. Hungwe allegedly told the board of Triangle Estates, the largest cultivator of irrigated sugar in Zimbabwe, that if Hungwe were made a Board member, Triangle would have "no more problems" with relation to the land resettlement program. Triangle demurred; its lands are now listed. Another contact in Save Conservancy reported last week that local Masvingo political heavyweights recently made renewed demands for outright grants of ownership and financial concessions from conservancy owners. He stated, "We feel like their attitude is that the Harare Chefs have gotten their share of the spoils, it's our turn now. We also detect a sense of urgency, as if they are coming to the end of the road and need action now." He now believes that the new listings explain the urgency.

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Comment  
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15. (SBU) Many of the properties have been listed before, and the new listings follow court decisions invalidating the previous acquisitions on technical grounds. However, the new wave of listings includes properties which have so far escaped widespread predation -- dairy farms, large-scale

sugar estates, timber lands. Rather than trying to seek a way out of the economic morass resulting from the displacement of productive agro-industries, the GOZ seems determined to pursue a Pyrrhic victory in which possession alone is the only measure of success. These new acquisitions can only do further, long-term damage to the already reeling economy.

Whitehead